

Your Voice, Your HMO Rights!

State of California



THE PATIENT
ADVOCATE

YOUR VOICE, YOUR HMO RIGHTS

What Does **THE OFFICE OF THE PATIENT ADVOCATE** Do?

During the last decade, the health care system has experienced drastic changes. One significant change was an increasing number of new Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) coming into the picture. As their numbers increased, so did the interest from the California government to ensure its citizens' health care interests were protected. To ensure this, in July 2000, Governor Gray Davis established the Department of Managed Health Care (Department) to license and regulate HMOs and the Office of the Patient Advocate to protect the health care rights of patients enrolled in an HMO. Both the Department and the Office of the Patient Advocate function under the Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency. It is the responsibility of the Patient Advocate to:

- Inform and educate HMO enrollees.
- Issue an annual Report Card on the performance of health plans.
- Provide advice and assistance.
- Advocate on behalf of individuals enrolled in HMOs.

INFORM and **EDUCATE**

Over 22 million Californians receive their health care through an HMO. Informing and educating them on how to best navigate the managed health care system

is one important duty of the Patient Advocate. In this new and complex system of health care delivery, enrollees have to understand a great amount of information. In order for individuals to exercise their health rights, it is important that they first understand what the system of managed health care is all about. The Office of the Patient Advocate recognizes this fact and is striving to:

- Provide basic but effective educational materials, stressing the most important information necessary for individuals to effectively navigate the system of managed health care.
- Prepare educational materials that are brief, clear, and easy to read and understand, and available in various languages.
- Keep enrollees informed of the most important events that might affect their health care.

Annual REPORT CARD on the PERFORMANCE of Health Plans

The Office of the Patient Advocate compiles valuable information on the performance of health plans and other health care providers. Based on that information, an annual report card is developed and starting in the Fall of 2001, will be available to assist HMO enrollees in making informed health plan selections. The report card will serve as a tool for enrollees to learn about not only the quality of care provided by health plans but also the type of services

provided, including preventive care. This allows enrollees to select the plan that best meets their needs and the needs of their families.

Provide **ADVICE** and **ASSISTANCE**

Another important duty of the Office of the Patient Advocate is to ensure enrollees receive expert advice and assistance with problems they are not able to resolve with their HMO.

The Office of the Patient Advocate works with the Department's California HMO Help Center (1-888-HMO-2219) to ensure that enrollees are able to resolve a problem with their HMO, obtain an independent medical review, or address other more complex issues.

The California HMO Help Center was created to provide individual and specialized support and guidance to enrollees with problems. The Department of Managed Health Care regulates the health plans and protects enrollees. The Office of the Patient Advocate and the Department of Managed Health Care work to ensure enrollees' problems with their HMO can be resolved.

The Patient Advocate works to empower individuals to become their own advocates by providing them with the guidance necessary to resolve their problems with their HMOs or by clarifying their concerns.

Advocate for

ENROLLEE PROTECTION

The Office of the Patient Advocate also serves as a watchdog for enrollees by identifying and offering solutions to problems that might potentially affect the health care of enrollees.

The Patient Advocate:

- Works with key players in the managed health care system to provide feedback on barriers and recurring problems faced by enrollees, and to advocate on their behalf.
 - Meets regularly with representatives from the Department of Managed Health Care to make recommendations for changes that will assist and improve the managed health care system.
 - Coordinates efforts with existing programs throughout the state to maximize available enrollee resources, avoid duplication of services, and provide a wider variety of referrals to enrollees.
- The Patient Advocate's networking efforts include state ombudsman programs, health plans, physician groups, legislators, and other key individuals.

Need **HELP**?

If you need expert assistance with a problem you cannot resolve with your HMO, contact the HMO Help Center toll free at (888) **HMO-2219** or TDD (877) **688-9891**.

Want to **LEARN** More?

If you are interested in learning more about the Office of the Patient Advocate and the HMO Help Center, be sure and visit the Department of Managed Health Care's web site on the Internet at: <http://www.hmohelp.ca.gov>



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